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POLISH ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN UNION

Poland's accession to the European Union not only required fundamental systemic changes, but also necessitated other methods of describing Poland's place and mission in Europe. It would be difficult to conceptualise these transformations in a straightforward manner, not to mention evaluate them. The aims of this paper are primarily explorative in nature. The objective is to outline a framework for a discussion on the attitudes of Poles towards the EU seven years after Poland's accession; both public opinion surveys and research publications will be taken into consideration. The main thesis of the analysis put forward boils down to the claim that these standpoints cannot continue to be described as opposing categories of "enthusiasm" – "scepticism". This stems from the fact that, in general, they are characterised by a favourable detachment. The Polish Euro-indifference is a combination of the strong conviction that EU membership is a positive and beneficial phenomenon on the one hand, and a complete lack of involvement in European matters on the other. So long as Polish citizens were 'queuing' to join this elite club, EU membership was being idealised; once, they managed to enter it – or, as it used to be worded in Poland, the "return to Europe" – opinions on EU membership started to become more pragmatic.

THE PRE-ACCESSION PERCEPTION OF THE EU IN POLAND

In the pre-accession period the European Union was present in the Polish social consciousness mainly in the form of the metaphor of the "return to Europe". This slogan was often perceived as controversial, since it implied that the borders of Europe could be identified with the borders of the European Union; also, because it indirectly questioned the European identity of Poland. The discussion between the advocates of the "return to Europe" and those who claimed Poland cannot return to Europe, as in fact, it had always belonged there, remained barren to a large extent. This stemmed from the well-grounded misunderstanding of the concept of European identity. As Jerzy Jedlicki succinctly put it: "It turns out Poland simultaneously is and is not a part of Europe, or maybe rather the idea of Europe tends to have different meanings in different contexts"¹. Nevertheless, this misunderstanding is far from

¹ J. Jedlicki, *Poland's Perpetual Return to Europe*, in: *Cross Currents: a yearbook of Central European Culture* (1993) p. 78.

being trivial. Not only has it opposed a form of idealism with a realistic perception of EU integration, but also has reflected the Poles' ambivalent attitude to their peripheral position. In fact, the debate on the European identity of Poland quickly died down after Poland's accession to the Union. This allows one to think that the tension in the public sphere in Poland related to this issue did not stem from actual internal doubts about our own European identity, but rather from a tacit fear of being perceived from the outside as a society, to some extent, alien to Europe.

Identifying EU membership with being a part of Europe obviously was grounded in the system. Access to a common market and other freedoms guaranteed to the member states was directly linked to the Polish vision of western prosperity. This idea, key for the Polish way of perceiving EU integration, in fact, was not understood strictly in economic terms. In this respect a European identity was "recognized as a higher civilizational standard, i.e. a higher level of life and a wealthier society, with modern technologies being applied to everyday activities. However, this meaning of Europe also includes a common respect for values such as law and order, cleanliness, work ethics, politeness and reliability"². In other words, the return to Europe was, in this context, supposed to denote a return to the path of modernisation, understood as westernisation. Therefore, the main challenge in terms of development was the fact that "Poland's peripheral position meant being in the vicinity, but not in their centre of major historical processes which took place on the continent; these included colonial expansion and technological revolution, and hence – modernisation"³.

In contrast to the discourse focused on modernisation, the advocates of a broader perspective on European identity (which Poland was assumed never to have lost) stressed the need of including also the pre-modern values essential for the idea of Europe. Consequently, they tended to broaden the historic perspective beyond the 18th century, emphasising the European heritage of the First Republic of Poland. The list of Poland's historic achievements mentioned above included religious ones – Poland as the bulwark of Christianity opposing Islam, as well as of Catholicism opposing the Orthodox church; political ones – the parliamentary system and political tolerance, in contrast to Eastern autocratic rule; as well as cultural ones – the Latin alphabet rather than Cyrillic script⁴. The thing about the claim that there must be more to Europe than just the common market, which – as the saying goes – one cannot fall in love with, is that it is easily gains recognition, but rarely has any practical application.

The juxtaposition between an idealistic and realistic vision of European identity, to an extent, also translates to the social divisions in Polish society. Idealistic thinking was primarily characteristic of the ethos of intellectuals. Moreover, it seemed to be presented in the public sphere to a degree larger than its actual popularity. This was accurately, yet maybe slightly too sharply, put by Zdzisław Mach:

² Ibidem p. 79.

³ A. Horolets, *Obrazy Europy w Polskim dyskursie publicznym*, Kraków 2007, p. 20.

⁴ Z. Mach, *Heritage, Dream, and Anxiety: the European Identity of Poles*, in: Z. Mach, D. Niedźwiedzki, *European Enlargement and Identity*, Kraków 1997, p. 35-37.

“For the educated elites Europe was a mythical paradise of freedom, market economy and democracy. For the majority of society, farmers and workers, Europe was also a mythical paradise of prosperity, where everyone enjoyed an abundance of goods. For most uneducated Poles Europe was less so an ideological centre of tradition and values, but rather a mythical paradise which they wanted to belong to – a paradise of wealth known from stories told by relatives living abroad, accounts of those few who had the opportunity to travel, or from Western films”⁵.

Additionally, the dichotomy of the visions of Europe expressed by intellectuals and non-intellectuals, in a rather fickle way, subscribes to the relation centre–periphery. The dream of returning to Europe, as an aspiration for prosperity, unassumingly recognises our own underdevelopment; simultaneously, however, by admitting the peripheral position, it finds value in overcoming it through carrying out transformations imposed by those in the centre. In turn, the thesis of Poland’s perennial European identity questioned the country’s peripheral position on the one hand, and simultaneously was an unintentional testimony to that position on the other. For instance, emphasising the key role of Christian heritage for the strength of European identity is inconsistent with the post-Christian character of many Western European societies. Moreover, the tendency to make distant historic references might seem similarly eccentric, as EU integration has been rather based on forgetting than brooding on past events.

Equalling the EU with Europe seemed controversial in Poland so long as Poland remained outside the Union. Incidentally, yet another Polish debate which could be labelled “between the East and the West” turned out to be unfruitful; in fact, it ended not through reaching a conclusion, but because public interest dwindled away.

“In the context of *the return to Europe* equally many valuable remarks have been made, as absolutely nonsensical ones, ridden of elementary logic. The debate on our place in Europe, unleashed in the process, (...) generally finished in an uninteresting and void compromise between the advocates of *westernness*, or *westernising* Poland, and the opponents of a too close integration with Western European structures, as well as those who – not without justification – emphasised the significance of Eastern elements in our national culture”⁶.

The dispute with respect to Europe’s boundaries has had a long history, and its only conclusive outcome so far has been the apparent inability to reach a consensus. The conceptual boundaries of European identity can be stipulated in reference to two geographical axes: North – South and East – West. As far as contrasting North and South is concerned, one can observe that “At times, the South has tried to define the identity of Europe. (...) Renaissance Europe probably was the most explicit attempt by the South to define Europe. This is Europe defined by its culture. The other way around, defining Europe by the North, is a rather recent phenomenon: it is Europe

⁵ Ibidem, p. 40.

⁶ R. Zenderowski, *Pomiędzy Wschodem a Zachodem*, „Przegląd Zachodni” 2004, No. 3, p. 14-15.

defined by its welfare”⁷. In other words, putting the stereotype this way juxtaposes the rustic charms of pre-modern values and the disillusioned world of modernised economies. In terms of the East – West differentiation, what can be noticed is that

“division follows the two different modes of agrarian production in Europe: the small agrarian peasant household producing for himself and in part for the landowners against the feudal land-ownership system prevailing in the East. (...) The East–West distinction was always related to the experience of the Eastern border as a ‘frontier’. (...) The East is the space from once the ‘Mongols’ came, then the ‘Russians’ and finally the ‘Soviet Communists’”⁸.

In this respect, entering the European Union gave Polish people a sense of moving the frontier further to the East. Similarly, just like the previous extension of the EU changed the permanently peripheral (as it would seem until recently) character of countries such as Greece or Portugal.

Joining the European Union curtailed the debate on the “return to Europe”; however, it would be difficult to say whether it had any bearing on the change in the Polish attitude toward EU integration. As far as the “modernisation camp” is concerned, it would even appear that there was no significant change in the way of thinking, which only “received a new façade”. In terms of the discourse on the necessity of transformations, the paradigm of the “return” was changed into that of “catching up”, while EU institutions continued to be perceived as external guarantees of stability. Simultaneously, the date of Poland’s accession to the EU became another candidate for a symbolic turning point finalising the process of systemic transformation. The way this date will be seen in the long run remains an open question: whether it will be a point of discontinuity, or a small fragment of a larger process. It seems, however, that perceiving EU membership as a stable state of affairs is an element of the pre-accession configuration. Yet, when looking at the EU from the inside, it turns out that “there is no Europe, only Europeanization, understood as an institutionalised process of continual change... Europe is just another word for the changing geometry, changing national interests, changing internal relations, changing statehood, changing identity”⁹.

THE POST-ACCESSION PERCEPTION OF POLAND’S EU MEMBERSHIP

Opinion polls demonstrate that from the start a great majority of Poles have been convinced that EU membership is beneficial for Poland. It should be noted that the percentage of those in favour of integration was initially slightly lower, and hence, more in line with the result of the accession referendum. With time, however, the

⁷ K. Eder, *The narrative construction of the boundaries of Europe*, “European Journal of Social Theory” 2006, No. 9(2), p. 263.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 264.

⁹ U. Beck, E. Grande, *Europa kosmopolityczna*, Warszawa 2009, p. 32-33.

division between Euro-enthusiasts and Euro-sceptics became blurred. Furthermore, opinions that were openly anti-European opinions became scattered and died down, which to a large extent, stems from the disintegration of the political environment being united around opposing the ratification of the accession treaty. The short-term perspective did not bear out the pessimistic forecasts of a disadvantageous membership; neither did any obvious threats to Polish national identity emerge.

For the most part, the temporary weakening of Euro-enthusiasm immediately after Poland's accession to the EU was "interpreted as a symptom of the 'accession shock' described in other countries, which manifests itself through a feeling of disorientation caused by a confrontation of the over-optimistic expectations"¹⁰. Although the existence of the accession shock can be demonstrated in many other countries becoming EU member states, this explanation does not seem fully convincing and sufficient. Above all, it should be borne in mind that the short span of this drop in EU support can be ascertained with certainty only with time. Additionally, it needs to be noted that it was only in the context of the campaign prior to the accession referendum that political environments representing clearly anti-European views revealed themselves. This breach of the existing pro-European consensus functioning above political divisions was further strengthened by the fierce controversies around the changes of the provisions established by the treaty of Nice, and the ultimately unsuccessful ratification of the Constitutional Treaty. In other words, the temporary expansion of anti-European views might have resulted not only from disorientation, but in fact also from the awareness of specific processes, and internal European policies that in some respects were assessed negatively.

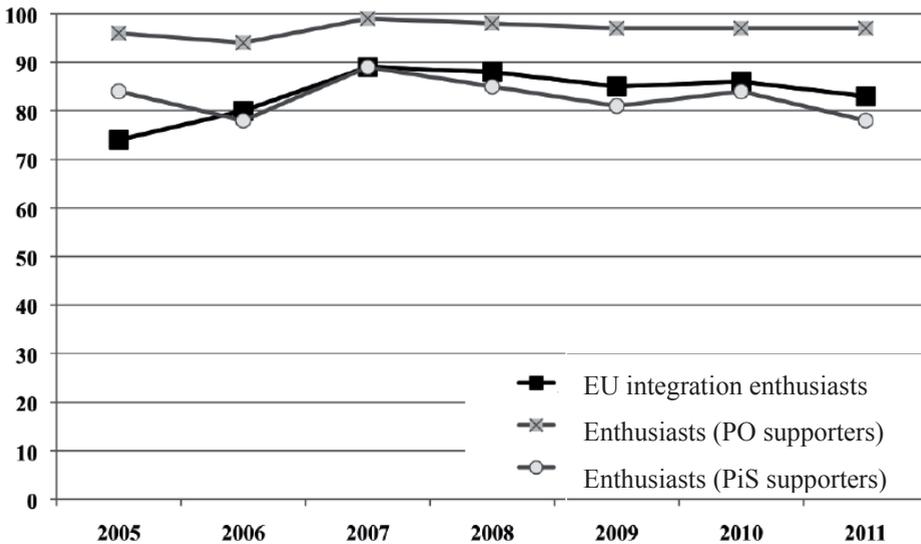
The idea of the "accession shock" remains an interesting interpretation, when considered in a context wider than merely that of a temporary disappointment resulting from too high expectations. According to the quoted analysis by Elżbieta Skotnicka-Illasiewicz, the tension between the pre- and post-accession conditions of the assessment seems to be a much more convincing interpretative lead. On the one hand, she rightly notices that the "results of opinion polls indicated that we agreed to join the EU rather 'under the influence of history and current events in Europe' than because of a 'conscious choice'. Moreover, we were convinced that if our choice was right, it would be our children and grandchildren that would benefit from it in the distant future"¹¹. In fact, in the pre-accession period, integration was discussed primarily in terms of values, and was talked about in the context of historic justice. After the long-awaited "return to Europe", the perception of EU membership quickly became more pragmatic: "As the capacity to actually calculate the gains and costs improved, and we could identify ourselves with the European environment to a greater extent, more rational assessments and opinions became commonplace;

¹⁰ E. Skotnicka-Illasiewicz, *Dynamika zmian świadomości społecznej w mijającym pięcioleciu członkostwa*, in: E. Skotnicka-Illasiewicz, *5 lat członkostwa Polski w Unii Europejskiej w perspektywie społecznej*, Warszawa 2009, p. 42.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

these do not lend themselves easily to the pressure of current events"¹². As the benefits gained by Poland and Poles from EU integration became relatively obvious, this new, pragmatically oriented mode of narration quickly became a fairly permanent basis for social support of the EU integration process.

Figure 1
Support for Poland's integration with the EU, 2005-2011



Source: based on data from the Public Opinion Research Centre, www.cbos.pl; reports used: BS/71/2005, BS/76/2006, BS/70/2007, BS/60/2008, BS/64/2009, BS/56/2010, BS/52/2011.

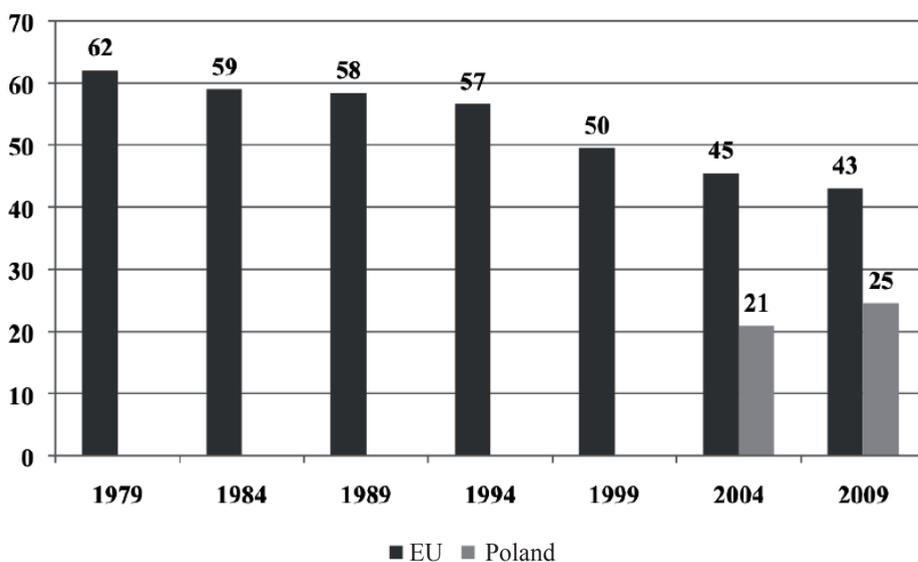
A positive attitude towards Poland's EU membership has become dominant in all of the social-demographic groups. Even the supporters of the Law and Justice political party (PiS) – the only major party presenting anti-European tendencies – in general remain satisfied with Poland's membership in the EU. The structure of the electorate of Law and Justice is reflected in the party's position towards the issue of EU integration. It is characterized by being sensitive to Euro-sceptical arguments and sentiments, yet at the same time continuing to be favourably disposed towards Poland's presence in the EU. In recent years both the political standpoint and the supporters of Law and Justice (PiS) were strongly opposed to those of the Civic Platform (PO). However, EU membership has never been a point around which it would be possible to construct a political disagreement. Naturally, certain disputes with respect to European matters – often very emotional ones – did arise between

¹² Ibidem, p. 45.

Law and Justice and the Civic Platform. These, however, focused around the question what Poland should do in the EU, and not whether it should be in the Union at all. The Euro-sceptical part of Law and Justice's electorate was inherited when the party absorbed those voters who formerly supported the League of Polish Families (LPR) – the only party the majority of whose supporters declared an unfavourable attitude towards European integration. As a result of the League's election failure, since 2007 Euro-sceptical voters were without parliamentary representation. As a result, such views became weaker within the public sphere. Consequently, in Poland those who are negatively adjusted towards EU membership not only constitute a small group, but also are ridden of a political formation which could unite them as an electorate. What is more, the disappearance of Euro-sceptical political representation occurred in Poland, just as a new wave of support for Euro-scepticism began to surge in both old and new member states.

Figure 2

European Parliament election turnouts, 1979-2009



Source: based on European Parliament data, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/pl/turnout_pl.html

These predominantly positive attitudes declared by Polish people do not, however, entail a readiness for action. A glaring example of that was the especially low voter turnout in the EU parliamentary elections. In 2004 in Poland the turnout in the elections to the European Parliament was 21%, which was one of the lowest in the entire Union; the overall percentage of EU citizens who cast a ballot was 46%.

Hence, the low turnout in Poland reflected the general European trend showing that public opinion has lost interest in European Parliament elections. In 2009, in turn, the turnout was 24%, which was slightly better than the previous one; however, still one of the worst results in the entire European Union. If these trends continue, the percentage of Polish voters who take part in elections might converge with the EU average; nonetheless, this is not an optimistic forecast for the Union.

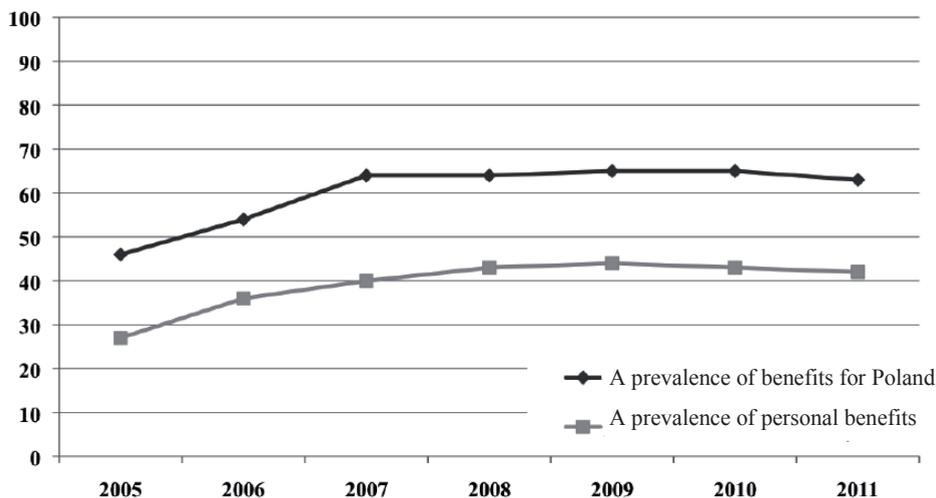
In 2009, just before the European Parliament election, a special Euro barometer report was published, on the predicted participation in the elections with respect to particular member states¹³. It characterised Polish society as above average in terms of indifference to the European election debate. The average percentage of those who declared interest in the matter in all member states was 44%, whereas in Poland this indicator was 30%. This placed Poland in the antepenultimate position in the Entire Union, with a lower interest noted only in the Czech Republic and in Latvia. Simultaneously, in the context of the results presented earlier, it is clear that in Poland, the lack of interest by no means equals a lack of acceptance. Poland's Euro-indifference is not Euro-scepticism, mainly because the European Union, as well as Poland's membership it is evaluated as definitely positive by Polish public opinion. Thus, the indifference of the voters towards elections to the European Parliament cannot stem from an antipathy for the institution. Although the trust for the European Parliament declared in Poland during the Euro election was on a par with the EU average (52% to 51% respectively), it should be noted that this indicator is much higher than in the case of Poland's national parliament.

THE PERCEPTION OF THE BENEFITS OF EU MEMBERSHIP

The positive indifference of Polish people with respect to EU integrative processes is based on a lack of coherence between the affective and behavioural components of their position. On the one hand, the EU is evaluated positively, but at the same time, there is a tendency not to become involved in European affairs, which, in turn, stems from a more general Polish lack of interest in public matters. On the other hand, with the end of the waiting period for EU accession, the Polish way of perceiving integration has become more down to earth. This process of pragmatism has been blamed as the reason explaining the temporary decay of the support for integration, immediately following Poland joining the EU. According to the explanation based on the "accession shock", the shift of public interest to the benefits from EU membership weakened Euro-enthusiasm, due to the fact that the said benefits were not immediate and visible enough to leave a mark on the social consciousness.

¹³ The European Elections 2009, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_299_en.pdf.

Figure 3
The opinions of the benefits related to EU integration



Source: based on data of the Public Opinion Research Centre, www.cbos.pl, reports used: BS/115/2005, BS/76/2006, BS/70/2007, BS/60/2008, BS/64/2009/, BS/56/2010, BS/52/2010.

The pragmatic reconfiguration of the way of thinking about the European Union from the pre-accession narration to the post-accession one had to influence the results of public opinion polls. “The idea of *joining the European Union* was perceived as a natural consequence on the events of 1989; a fulfilment of the postulate of *returning to Europe* without deeper reflection on the method and potential costs of the process. The society was not aware what integration entailed, and how much effort would be needed to meet the requirements put before Poland”¹⁴. It should be noted, however, that the general support for integration is greater, that the belief that our country enjoys substantial benefits resulting from its membership. In turn, the conviction that the integration process brings about individual, personal gains is even less common. In other words, should one juxtapose the answers to questions about the general support for integration, the belief that EU membership is beneficial for Poland, and the question about personal benefits, the result would be a hierarchy where a positive view of EU integration turns out to be more common than the belief in collective or personal gains obtained from this process. Consequently, the claim that the Polish way of thinking about European integration is strictly pragmatic

¹⁴ J. Ściegienny, *Opinia publiczna. Polacy wobec integracji europejskiej*, in: M. Fałkowski, J. Kucharczyk (eds.), *Obywatele Europy: integracja europejska w polskim życiu publicznym*, Warszawa 2005, p. 55.

would seem difficult to uphold. In the case of Poland, one could rather speak of a mutual strengthening of the pre- and post-accession narration, as well as of short- and long-term thinking. To a large extent, Poland's membership has turned out to be favourable, similarly to the social perception of integrative processes; many hopes have come true, while the majority of concerns have not. Nevertheless, it should not be inferred from this that the support for European integration will continue to be strong also in more challenging times.

An additional problem with rooting the support for European integration in a calculation of gains lies in the fact that the standards that particular individuals refer to are not clear. The contrast between "personal gains" and "benefits for the country" involves only one of these inconsistencies; in fact, when it comes to the vast majority of them, standard quantitative measures basically prove useless. Numerous examples are provided by studies carried out in the years 2005-2006, the objective of which was to perfect the tools of quantitatively measuring public opinion of European integration in the Wielkopolska region¹⁵. By resorting to the standard qualitative research technique of focus groups, the authors tried to register opinions on public matters, yet ones not related to participation in an actual public sphere. The objective was to identify how various communities¹⁶ understand particular research questions and issues. What the authors came across was fundamental – as it would seem in the case of the early accession stage – contrast between rural and urban communities.

Even a cursory glance at the research materials makes it possible to see that the EU mechanisms are a matter of individual experience in the case of farmers, whereas they do not have such a personal and practical character in the case of city inhabitants. Moreover, we are not only dealing with a contrast between a practical and discursive consciousness, but also both groups are aware of a difference in the fundamental way they experience EU membership. Additionally, opinions claiming that it is in fact farmers who are the main beneficiaries of integration processes are relatively common: "generally in Poland it might be farming, so, coming back, that's where its more tangible"¹⁷. What is interesting, as it has already been demonstrated, farmers are also aware of the social perception of the situation: "the media, all they see is plusses everywhere. Then those townies, so to say, listen and say how good we farmers have it, that we just get everything". This last view also indicates that there is a gap between the media image of reality, which to some extent all citizens participate in, and the practical details of contact with EU financial mechanisms, which mainly farmers deal with on a large scale.

¹⁵ P. Cichocki, P. Jabkowski, *Wielkopolska – regionalny kontekst integracji europejskiej*, Poznań 2010.

¹⁶ The focus group interviews were carried out in three types of locations: in the capital of the region (Poznań), two former voivodeship cities (Leszno, Piła), and a number of other rural and town-rural areas (*gminy*) (Gołańcz, Brodnica Śremska, Chawłodno, Smogulec).

¹⁷ Opinions cited from the transcripts of the above-mentioned focus group interviews.

Although a general awareness of some large – though unspecified when it comes to size – financial expenditures on the development of the country has been noted, city inhabitants experience them as impersonal infrastructural investments. “It’s like this: half of the funds, the money to be spent, sort of, on what is ours (...) we don’t see. How are we supposed to know about some or other plans or investments, and whether they financed from EU funds or not”. Investments in developing infrastructure are perceived as impersonal in the sense that they pertain to public goods and public space, and not directly to the households of individual citizens. Contrary to the inhabitants of rural areas employed in farming, city inhabitants have noticed new buildings, roads and bridges, the construction of which they can, to some extent, attribute to EU support. However, they are unable, or find it difficult to put down the improvement of their personal wellbeing to various forms of European help. “It seems to me that this is practically the only such tangible proof of these changes. In some places, I don’t know, maybe finding a job is easier, maybe such other changes have happened as well, but they are, lets say, less visible than all these investments, be it a motorway, some new buildings or construction sites”.

The contrast between a practical and discursive way of experiencing European integration is also clearly visible in relation to the issue of allegedly pervasive European bureaucracy when it comes to managing funds.

“Well, maybe like this. Firstly, with time the system will change; the system, that is the power of bureaucracy in Poland. The governing politicians will finally realise that we do not need such a massive administrative apparatus as we have now, because it serves for nothing really, apart from feeding itself. The second thing is, we will learn more about capitalism, maybe in the sense that the financial ladder will change somewhat. We all know it will stratify, and the poor will become poorer and the rich will be richer, because that’s natural – well, that’s just the way it is, but in the middle... I mean something like a middle class will appear after all.”

Whereas in the case of farmers, we are dealing with very specific experiences: “and at random they picked me for an inspection. They came to check up on how I run all the books, and I had things written down, of course (...) and well, they came and inspected, and sure I was the second or so who had the region written down. Now in April I had to count everything up, and I’m just wondering and I think I’ll just quit. It just doesn’t add up”. Or cases such as:

“there’s just no information. Let me just say, I deliver the milk, and we were told the reproductive year starts on 1st April and ends on the last day of May. But the reproductive year to raise the milk quotas ended on the 4th February, and I submitted an application to increase the milk quota on the 8th March, so that ship had sailed, it was too late. And who informed us? The people from Marceliška street told us the president should have informed us, the president said: you won’t get it, I’ll add those kilograms, because the national reserve has only so much to share. It turned out I had been given my notice, and that was that. And there was quite a pile of papers from those who had submitted those applications”.

As a side note, it should be mentioned that in the above-mentioned complaints on the accumulation of bureaucratic difficulties, both European and local elements overlap. The extensive formal EU procedures are put into practice by the ineffective Polish civil service. As a result, in the experience of farmers who receive financial support, bureaucracy has a particular form of “the people from Marcelińska street” and ceases to be only a vague vision of “the people from Brussels”.

An additional element which combines both ways of thinking about public matters is the ability to perceive positive phenomena mainly in terms of comparative reference groups. However, noticing one’s own structural involvement poses difficulties. In fact, when individuals see their dependence on the structure, it is chiefly in a limiting sense, and rarely in a context where it enables things. In this case, we are talking about an impairment of a common sociological imagination, an inability to perceive the relation between one’s own biographic trajectory and phenomena occurring on the macro level. Thinking about European Union mechanisms is relatively shallowly rooted in the practical consciousness of farmers. Firstly, it pertains to a rather small portion of the activity of European institutions, and it mixes with the way national and local administration function. This small fragment of Poland’s Europeanisation is insufficient to work out an opinion on the nature of this process. Secondly, farmers do not define the practical experience of EU financial help in running a farm as a public problem. Instead, it appears to be a private matter, important for economic reasons rather than political ones. In this case the contrast private/public translates rather straightforwardly into the already described juxtapositions of practical and discursive consciousness, as well as micro and macro levels. What is fundamental for the colloquial way of thinking about Poland’s integration with the EU is the inability to move from the private and practical micro-world to a public and discursive macro-perspective. From the point of view of the competence to function in the public sphere it leads to a paradoxical situation. Citizens, who are involved in egocentric discourse, cannot link their personal interests and experiences with macrostructures. It makes little difference, in this context, whether this inability stems from a lack of individual and practical experiences, or from not being able to interpret them.

Similar research carried out after seven years of Poland’s EU membership, would probably produce drastically different results. One reason for this would be the enormous extent of actions carried out within the framework of the Human Capital Programme. Nonetheless, the main objective of relating the results of this qualitative analysis carried out during the immediate accession stage is to illustrate the disordered variety of attitudes hidden behind sterile quantitative indicators. On a macro level, it is easy to formulate theses about the dependence of the support for European integration from the declared individual or collective benefits obtained from EU membership. In the case of particular persons, groups and communities, opinions on the topic evolve as a result of distinct beliefs and

expectations in such a way that any general statements sound more like clichés. We do know that a positive view of Poland's membership in the EU prevails. It also seems that these opinions and beliefs are long-lasting, but by no means strong. However, still not much is known about the actual rooting of these regularities in the social consciousness.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is difficult to find a common denominator in the attitudes of Poles towards the European Union. By referring to a simple line of thought, where Euro-sceptics are opposed to Euro-enthusiasts, one could claim that Polish society and public discourse remain to a large extent enthusiastic towards integration. However, Euro-sceptical opinions function as well. Nonetheless, this analysis does not reflect the entire landscape of current Polish attitudes adequately. It did have a justified application in the pre-accession period; however, later, even when the Law and Justice party was in power, when Polish politics openly referred to our national interests, naturally alarming many European partners, the anti-European rhetoric was rare in Poland. Poland also avoided the wave of controversies around the Euro currency and Schengen agreement, which shook public support for the integration processes in many states of the "old" EU-15. In fact, Poland's problem is not so much a dispute over the Union, but rather the lack of a matter-of-fact dispute. The weakness of the European public sphere, as well as a fundamental deficit of the democratic legitimacy of EU institutions is not a specifically Polish problem. At the same time, however, it seems that these pan-European tendencies appear to be relatively stronger in Poland than in other member states. Poles seem to be European citizens only by name, as they do not link this forma-legal status with any particular attitudes, apart from a certain general pride and satisfaction gained from this fact.

